Saltstone

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by CrippledShadow

Summary

Like scars that show qualities of a life lived some experiences can not be healed, only fading with time.

Thirteen years after the conclusion of The Hourglass Will and Hannibal are still striving to find structure and balance in their relationship as Will still cannot escape his guilt and abandoned morals particularly in how their influence bleeding through to Abigail, Eleanor and Annabel.

Notes

Hello all,

Although I had planned from the beginning to include a short prequel fic to TM and TH I was hesitant to complete the epilogue chapter for two reasons. First, a part of me thought leaving on an unconfirmed note was better to allow the option of people deciding for themselves if this Hannigram variation has a future or not, and secondly, it seems unavoidable that any followup would present ideas like 'settling with an abuser'. However, as A/B/O fics in my experience often feature themes mostly around exaggerated altered/flipped perspectives that I would not endorse in any other context and I could not see an alternative ending for this version of Will and Hannibal I have decided to include it :)

See the end of the work for more notes

The view from the balcony was very different to the last time he had looked out over water. A different ocean, very pale blue and waves like clear glass as they broke upon the faded almost white shore. Will sighed as he let the veranda rail take his weight as he watched the evening set in. The house was by Hannibal's standards very simple, only two stories accented in gentle creams and blues but equipped with a kitchen more extravagant than any other room.

Hannibal had so easily shifted them into a new life, a life that had belonged to a now deceased couple. Will had deliberately not asked for details about the Fells, or the special cuts of meat that still sometimes appeared on their table, beyond confirmation that they had not had children.

Roman Fell's gaudy flat in the art district, purchased only a month earlier in preparation for his appointment at the gallery and fortunately without direct correspondence with the former owner, was quite easily sold for a larger but more quaint place more suited for young children. The small villa about an hour outside Florence they were currently staying at had been owned for some years but listed under the name of a cousin Will had never met or heard mentioned otherwise. He still wondered how many years the alpha must have spent preparing for the possibility that he would get caught.

The process still seemed far too simple, from getting out of America to hiding almost in plain sight. Margot had made an unlikely ally. Alana may have been bound by her convictions to report them but Margot had suffered much more than Will expected he knew and didn't hesitate to make necessary arrangements for the children when he called her two days after Dollarhyde's death. She had even assured him before leaving that Alana had already been to the animal shelter and claimed all seven of the dogs.

Almost absentmindedly Will's hand brushed the scar on his cheek, running along the long numb divot in his skin. It had taken so long to stitch up with Hannibal barely able to stand from loss of blood but still refused to attend to his own injuries until he'd finished Will's.

For the first few years Will half expected that any given day there would be a knock on the door from the local police or for one of them to be arrested in public but nothing had come about as of yet. Two years ago an international obituary section had been left on the kitchen counter for him to find, quietly acknowledging an old friend outlived by his obsession. There would have been others over the years with the same aggressive good intentions as Crawford and may still be in the dwindling department but eventually he and the Chesapeake Ripper would be left as another unsolved investigation.

He was aware of the story Hannibal had implied to his new colleagues and acquaintances, for a man of his charm and tastes could not avoid attracting a swarm of admiring fellows, pieced together from persistent politeness and things left unsaid on the rare occasions he was required to socialise.

The family had relocated due to 'Dr Fell's' American mate suffering a mental breakdown not long after the younger two children were born. There was so much sympathy for an alpha who persisted with a damaged omega; after all a mate was not discarded under any

circumstances, of course not, that would have been tasteless, but put somewhere safe out of sight and mind to allow for a more appropriate replacement. Even if a household was functioning the practice of second and even third omegas were much more common if an alpha could afford it.

For that quiet acceptance, Hannibal had granted Will another sanctuary to hide as best he could from the world even if he did still insist on Will and their daughters living mainly in the city with him for convenience both in proximity to the gallery, schools and his occasional hunting ventures. Hannibal had not forgotten how one of the first truths Will had confided in him was the practice of grounding himself by imagining his isolated house in Wolf Trap as a boat at sea and endeavoured to find ways to provide his mate with what was necessary for him to live within those constructed lies and play the variation of himself that supported their image.

As much as he hated to play into more narrow-minded perceptions let alone the atrocities he had grown to accept and therefore was attributed to as much as his mate was, Will found he cared less and less over time. After most of his life being spent pursuing flawed ideals and social structures that degraded him it seemed less unreasonable to want to hold onto a little bit of happiness with his family despite the cost.

While the girls had enjoyed taking the train from Florence out to the holiday house for weekends as children Hannibal remained in the city alone by unspoken agreement and only accompanied his omega on a monthly basis for his mate's heats.

Will winced as he straightened up. His cycles had steadily grown shorter but more painful and intense over the past five years, marking the narrowing window for more children. This would be one of his last heats.

Out of habit Will fished out his phone to check the time again and confirm no missed messages from Abigail. Her last Skype had been a week ago and factoring in the time difference it would be too late for her to call now. Abigail had been insistent on studying abroad and had not taken long to fall in love with the mix of arts and history perfectly melded to urban youth culture of Melbourne.

Behind him the sliding glass door leading to the master bedroom opened quietly and Will felt the other man come to stand behind him.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine, I guess," Will replied, leaning back against his mate. "Just, can't believe…They're almost all grown…"

Hannibal's arms snaked tighter around Will's waist and reached to gently pry the device from Will's hand and slide it into his own pocket. "Abigail is an intelligent and capable young woman at university and in an unfamiliar country. She will be enjoying herself too much to think about home."

Will knew he was probably right but it was difficult all the same. Her experience of higher education would thankfully be so vastly different to his own; free to enjoy and feel at home,

free from financial concerns and risk of being caught in an incriminating lie….

In the next two or three years the twins would be moving out as well and he wasn't quite sure he'd be ready for that, in no small part because of the justifications for his own actions largely be removed.

"And if the other girls want to go on studying too?"

"For all the complications faced so far they have grown to value education and creative outlets, something that should not be discouraged. There are precautions we can set in place so that they do not need to feel at risk on a university campus although I do not believe Eleanor or Annabel would allow themselves to be made victims." There was a note of pride in his voice on the final words. "They are quite a credit to you and you should be proud, as I am."

There was no doubt that Hannibal had grown to care about their children but Will expected even that fondness was something conditional. He would never harm them, no that was against too many of the man's oddly tailored principles, but to call his feelings love was optimistic.

Will angled his head up enough to look at the alpha. The years had been kind to his mate; his hair and that showing on his arms was completely grey but retained the disciplined body of a younger man. The alpha wasn't any more afraid of age than he claimed of death but Will expected his stubbornness would allow him to maintain the same lifestyle until the end of his life.

"Do you ever feel like this is just, marking time? I never want the girls to have to face something like that. To be held under scrutiny by association or questioning everything they know because they *should have* known-"

"Will, I know you are not so naive as to believe that your daughters know nothing of our shared history or would be incapable of acceptance."

In the last few months there had been on occasion a glint of something predatory in Abigail's eyes, when she noticed alpha boys looking too interestedly at her little sisters or when she recounted a grievance about fellow student. Will couldn't help but wonder if there was too much of what had warped Hannibal into a killer residing in their eldest, more so than the potential that lay dormant for the most in all people.

Eleanor and Annabel still leaned on one another but enabled each other to persevere in equal measure, currently exceeding in advanced classes to astonishment and contempt of teachers and peers. For all the illusions they attempted to cast from the youthful innocence that fitted so well they were far more dangerous than their older sister. It was for them he feared more, perhaps for a greater sense of loss or something else all together. So much his mirror image in some ways and yet nothing like him simultaneously.

"Don't wander into your mind," Hannibal quietly yet firmly. "Let those trepidations wait. Stay with me."

Will felt up the alpha's torso with one hand to the collar, hooking a finger and thumb into his tie and tugging down sharply. Caught by surprise Hannibal's hands tightened about Will's hips even as the omega kissed him. The easy intimacy that they had once enjoyed had been hard to regain and therefore treasured all the better.

Will's eyes shot open with a smothered sound of shock as his mate bit down on his lower lip. In a breath the strong hands had moved up to his shoulders to turn him back to fully face him, the alpha locking him in his arms as he kissed him hard. When they parted Will was dazed, embarrassed how breathless he'd been rendered while the alpha was composed aside from a drop of perspiration at his hairline.

“It feels odd to say it but you are the best and worst of me, and I will never be able to exist without you.”

Hannibal's fingertips pressed under his shirt as he shifted the omega slightly, still cradling his most precious possession close to him. "And they are the best of both of us." *Or the worst as time will tell.*

The pattern of Will's heats had changed over the last few years, growing both more taxing and erratic in his behaviour.

Periodically begging for the burning pain to stop throughout the first day before losing the ability to speak along with any form of clarity. Through most of the cycle his poor mate could not last more than two hours without stimulation. The frantic need was quite cute as sometimes Will forgot he was not alone and made such sweet sounds of relief when his mate pulled those trembling fingers out of the way and pressed back into the waiting hole. However, recently Will had taken to scratching himself and his aching insides when left unsupervised as if raking himself bloody as a distraction was as good as satisfying his lust so Hannibal had needed to restrain him.

Even in his disoriented state Will didn't like being strapped down, calling for more creative measures. Although it would not have been difficult to acquire a proper breeding bench, designed especially for older omegas or others who suffered trying or violent heats for other reasons, Hannibal had not pressed the suggestion as he knew his mate would be resistant.

“Please,” Will whimpered as he was pressed gently to sit on the edge of the bed.

“What is it you need,Will?” Hannibal asked gently, fingers meticulously working under the waistband of Will’s shorts to pull them down.

“I...I...” Will tilted his hips up to let the alpha pull his shorts and underwear off and obediently lifted his arms when motioned to so his shirt could be removed too. It was a relief to have the uncomfortable material removed, already sticky with sweat but Will still struggled to string words together from the fever, aches through his limbs and throbbing pain already beginning between his legs.

“I know sweet boy but you are not immersed yet. You must sleep for a while. Would you like a sedative?”

Will shook his head with clear effort before easing himself back on the bed. “Can you… stay?”

“Of course.”

Hannibal untucked the sheet to drape over the man’s hips and settled next to him on the bed. Automatically the omega snuggled up against his side, soothed by the contact rather than agitating his already too warm skin. Running his fingers through Will’s hair and stroking down his back Hannibal allowed himself to admire his mate.

Will’s scent had changed more over the years than any physical trait. Perusing through glass perfume vials stored in one of the fondest rooms in his memory palace he recalled the delicious ripeness the first time he’d had the omega, finally free from suppressants. The added sweetness that accompanied pregnancy and nursing, taking on notes of Abigail and his own scents as the primary alphas in his life. Now in his mature heats Will was a mix of warm earthy tones and overripe fruit, heightened sweetness by its own components. That and some grey streaks beginning to show in the still thick curls was almost all that showed of the years that had past.

Hannibal waited until Will had drifted into a fevered sleep before retrieving the restraints from the cupboard. He attached the simple lightweight chain and padded ankle cuff to the bedpost and bound one of Will’s ankles. Next he gathered the omega’s wrists, slipping a pair of gloves similar to oven mitts over his hands, pulling the cuffs tight enough that Will would not be able to work them off and lightly binding his wrists together and to the bottom of the headboard. It was a small indignity but as he had gently explained the alternative that ensured he didn’t risk injuring himself was of course the use of other equipment.

The alpha was roused from a light doze himself only an hour later by the omega beside him, panting and squirming with need. Hannibal smiled and took his time in removing and properly folding his own clothes before returning to the bed, reaching to untie the twine holding Will’s wrists to the bed frame and carefully rolling the omega onto his back.

"Such a marvel that a mind as remarkable as yours was placed in a body designed only to be used to pleasure others and carry child after child..." Hannibal mused.

Will whimpered, mindless as he squirmed under the alpha's hands. Hannibal smiled again fondly and wasted no more time in sliding his own body over Will’s and cutting of the keening cries with a kiss as his fingers pressed into him and immediately found the spot to make his mate cry out for different reasons.

Will's mind did not return to him for four days. He was aware of sensations, the cycle of pain and pleasure, tender words and food and water occasionally pressed to his lips but very little

else. Waking exhausted on the fifth around midday judging by the light streaming through the thin curtains separating their bedroom from the veranda.

With some difficulty due to his bound hands Will pulled himself into a sitting position and tried to work the thin cord loose enough with his teeth. Before he could get free the alpha reappeared balancing a tray, setting it down to help.

“How are you feeling now?” Hannibal asked, kneeling to unclasp Will’s ankle and rubbing the skin to bring back the circulation.

“More or less accounted for,” Will replied, stretching out his stiff limbs and then bringing his knees back up to rest his elbows against them.

“Good.” Hannibal retrieved the tray laden with cheese, fruit, several bottles of water and a large pitcher of iced tea and set it down beside his mate. They ate the light lunch in comfortable silence. After the glasses and empty plates had been cleared away Hannibal wordlessly guided Will through to the ensuite bathroom and started filling the tub.

"I need to shower properly.”

"Later. You must be sore."

Will agreed that did sound nice but felt a little embarrassed when the alpha felt the need to gently pick him up and lower him into the bath.

“Where are you going?”

“Just a moment.”

Hannibal returned several minutes later bearing two champagne flutes and a bottle in an ice bucket balanced in the crook of his arm. Although he did not recall the name Will recognised the shape and imported label as identical to the one they had shared with the children (Eleanor and Annabel also allowed a glass due to the occasion) three months earlier to celebrate Abigail being accepted to her first choice university.

“Is this a special occasion?” Will asked. He accepted both glasses and shifted forward enough to let the alpha get into the bath behind him.

“Somewhat,” Hannibal answered, settling comfortably in the warm water and arranging his omega between his legs. “It will not be long before our children are grown and you and I are allowed to enter the final chapter of our lives.”

Will sighed letting his eyes drift shut. It had been so long since he’d stood on the edge of an eroding bluff wrestling with his conflicting morals, weighing the possible cost to his little girls against his own beliefs and more than likely his sanity and choosing them.

Abigail had shown the self appointed sense of responsibility of an eldest child and older sibling of omegas from as early as five and pursued every academic task and athletic pursuit with focus bordering on obsessive nature.

It had taken longer for personality and behavioural traits visible to those outside of family members in the twins although their interests differed quite significantly. Eleanor had taken up piano when she was only seven, working at the instrument with focus and under her father's guidance had even tried her hand at composition. Annabel did not share her interest in arts but found her fascination in mathematics and telecommunications. Irregardless of any differences though all three remained close.

"They deserve better than you and me."

"Is that what you are worried about?" Hannibal asked genuinely curious.

For all her academic accomplishments Abigail was a blunt tool. Fiercely protective and no doubt would show no hesitation if pushed to take a life to protect a loved one. No hesitation, no remorse but also no pleasure. The alpha girl would not be burdened by those conflicting feelings in the way her mother was. Perhaps that would be somewhat freeing for her.

The potential he saw in the twins was a pleasant surprise as for all Will's attempts to shelter the younger two, representative of much more, something beautiful and deadly had come to exist within the pair through nature not nurture. Once Hannibal would have delighted in teasing out that potential, indeed he still desired to nurture it, but he expected that would have been a breaking point for his omega.

He had lost too many years trying to remake his mate for short periods of satisfaction. It had been through his own mistakes that he'd lost him for three years and had no intention of letting anything happen again. An outlet for his more primitive urges was served through his omega's cycles.

"Abigail would murder if felt it necessary and she would do so without hesitation or guilt," Will said, staring pointedly ahead of him. *As I did…* He took a larger drink than was strictly appropriate. "But Ellie and Anna? I think that would make you…happy."

Hannibal was slightly disappointed that his beloved mate would feel the need to ask that although he reasoned not without merit.

"I am a proud man as you know well, I will not deny it, but I do not wish for an apprentice to take on any of the masks I have lived in once I am gone from this life," Hannibal said musingly. "But I do not wish for our children to settle in any circumstance without escape."

Will sighed out, relaxing slightly against the alpha, happy for now to let the silence hold.

Dinner had been simple although not for the first time Hannibal had needed to redirect Will's attention to his plate. He knew that his omega was no stranger to hunger and the other accompaniments of poverty but it still frustrated to see the younger man not taking care of himself.

For far too much of his life the omega had been viewed overall as odd and perceived as weak for struggling to control the qualities that made him so unique. Through this, combined with

the stress of hiding his secondary sex, he had learned to hold very little value of himself.

He was not required back at work for two more days so they had agreed to stay a final night before returning to Florence. Only a few hours after retiring for the night Hannibal awoke to the other side of the bed cold and empty; he looked to find the screen door open and Will once again on the balcony.

Hannibal approached quietly and laid a gentle hand on the small of his omega's back. Will startled but didn't say anything. Although there were a number of things he would've liked to ask or felt was necessary but restrained for something simpler.

"Are you cold?"

Will started to shake his head and then murmured an answer. "I don't think so."

Hannibal draped an arm about the omega's shoulders, wrapping him more closely in his arms when the omega didn't pull away.

"I wanted to give you another child. Many times."

Will was surprised by the statement or admission not because he was not aware that at least at one point in time the alpha had been captivated by the idea of several more little ones but by the timing and the note of sadness in his voice as his arm glanced down over Will's flat belly.

"Why?" Will turned his head to look back at him. "I want to know."

Hannibal drew back to the small day bed, pulling Will down with him. He took a few moments to comfortably settle the omega between his legs before answering.

"A second chance for our family. For you to experience that joy again with the security and comfort you deserve rather than being denied one for the other."

"I suppose from your perspective that's all you've ever done for us," Will sighed.

"No. I am not too proud to admit that I have acted selfishly but I cannot regret any methods or rash actions as the result is still you. Your pain is all I regret."

Will played the honest words over in his head. For all the alpha's meticulous planning and control, the qualities that had allowed him to hold record of those he considered not worthy of life for years until no traceable link remained to connect him, Hannibal was still very much a man of passion and therefore loses of control over areas that pleased his primitive side were not unexpected.

Resigned was the word he used most often to describe his feelings about their life, which was also the most positive of those that came to mind. Perhaps there would have been some satisfaction in dragging his mate over that cliff so many years ago now. He would never escape Hannibal in life and it would have been something of a victory no matter how brief to snuff out the man who so despised suicide.

His own life was a paradox while the alpha's absence had the potential to make him ache yet felt guilt ridden and fearful in his company almost as often as not so it was not for his own sake he remained but for the three children they'd created. Yet that was not the entire truth. For all he wished he didn't at times he loved Hannibal by this point unconditionally.

"Most of the time I'm happy or something close. That's more than what we deserve so it's enough." Will tried to turn in the alpha's hold and after realising what he was doing Hannibal loosened his arms enough to let his mate wrap his own arms around him and huddle closer into his chest.

Hannibal lowered his chin to rest on Will's head and once again closed his arms about him tightly. Over the edge of the balcony rail the path paved with sandstone leading down to the beach was lost to the night, the water a navy sheet rippling with splashes of harsh white under the sparse moonlight.

End Notes

As I have said before I never really believed that a happy ending was possible for this story but a content or close to it was able to be done. Also, as Abigail was the only one of the children who would have some memories of beforehand it seemed likely that she would want to study abroad. Since the US would have been too risky even answer a different name I couldn't help selecting Australia and the one campus that seemed perfect.

As always, let me know what you think :)

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